

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

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GENERAL GRANT AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.

GENERAL GRANT is the first man who has traveled around the world and has everywhere been received with the highest honors. Europe, which has led civilization for centuries, and still pushes forward in its van, and Asia, which ages ago ceased to progress, and has since maintained a supercilious indifference to the march of events in other quarters, have alike testified their admiration of him, and have vied with each other in according him the fullest manifestation of esteem and respect. Never before has the fame of any man encircled the globe contemporaneously with the course of the career by which it was won. When he left the presidential chair all the peoples of the earth, whether civilized or semi-barbarous, according to our own standard, recognized him as the foremost man of his time.

Since the Napoleonic era our great rebellion was the only decisive event of the century. Upon the issue of that contest depended not only the fate of our own republic, but the salvation of "government of the people for the people by the people." Nay, more, the violent disruption of the great experimental republic would have marked a reaction in the liberal tendencies of government everywhere, and the success of the rebellion would have cast the shadow of the seventeenth century again on the dial-plate of civilization. It was the first time the destiny of mankind had hung in the balance, since the marvelous

utilization of the forces of nature had brought into every-day communication the once isolated nations of the earth; and it was the first time the whole world had been able to watch, step by step, the solution of a problem upon which its future depended. The various vicissitudes of the contest were as well understood by our antipodes as ourselves; and our national triumph was known and appreciated by them on the very day on which it was achieved. It was the most "tidable rebellion that a nation ever undertook to cope with, and the commander who had marshaled the national forces to victory was recognized as the greatest living soldier almost before the smoke had disappeared from the last battle-field. Elected to the Presidency, he was regarded by the whole world as a national hero, whom his countrymen had clothed with the highest magisterial functions to pilot them through the turbulent period of restoration which followed the suppression of armed opposition. His troubled administration was watched with intense interest, and at its close the announcement of his proposed tour abroad created a world-wide sensation. In the active west, and the indolent east of the old world, his progress was a series of ovations; and he will undoubtedly stand on the pages of history as the first man who voyaged around the world and found no spot where his fame had not preceded him. The changes which a hundred years have produced are strongly exemplified by the fact that General Grant has been enthusiastically welcomed in countries where the names of Washington and Napoleon are hardly yet known. His reception abroad has been a surprise to his countrymen. Something of that formal courtesy with which it is the fashion of civilized countries to receive distinguished foreign officials was expected; but the unexampled enthusiasm with which he has been greeted, and the cordial manner in which he has been entertained, were quite unexpected. This foreign estimate of him has aroused the national pride not a little. That our country has produced such a man touches a patriotic chord in the popular heart, and he returns home to

find that his own countrymen are determined not to be outdone by strangers in doing him honor.

Their fellow-citizen is greater than they thought him ; and they show the balance of the world that they know how to appreciate native greatness when once fully made aware of its existence. His trip around the world has developed his high reputation, and of that reputation they are proud. Henceforth his good name becomes a matter of national importance in the popular mind ; and he occupies the anomalous position of being a character whose exaltation a patriotic public considers a national duty. It appears now as if nothing can prevent his third nomination as a presidential candidate, except his own refusal to accept it. There are potent reasons, however, why this is not desirable. Without disparaging his general merits as a statesman, it may be said that he was wanting in that important element of statesmanship which successfully conserves and cultivates the political forces upon which it relies for success. When he was first elected President, the Republican party, as it now is, was the organization of the conservative sentiment of the people. It stood then, as it stands now, between the government and dismemberment.

Then, as it now is, everything outside the Republican party was either practically or avowedly destructive. Upon that party depended the existence of the country, and correct statesmanship implied an administration that would maintain its ascendancy, and, if possible, so strengthen it that the mischievous aims of its opponents would be abandoned as hopeless. But under General Grant's administration the Republican party steadily declined. That conservative force upon which he relied for success, in checking the destructive tendencies so dangerously manifest, was alarmingly dissipated.

He found the party in full possession of every department of the government, and left it in a minority in one House of Congress, doomed to a minority in the other, and unable to secure the presidency except by a questionable arbitration.

While the party may have made mistakes which contributed to its loss of power, and for which he was not responsible, yet its decadence was mainly due to faulty details of administration peculiar to himself. Governed in making his appointments largely by personal preference, he regarded his appointees as the sole medium of communication between himself and the mass of his party; precisely as a military commander communicates with the rank and file solely through the agency of subordinates. It is probably an inherent fault in political leaders whose previous training has been chiefly military, to carry into civil life the habits of military leadership. The fields of operation are widely different, and the discipline which insures success in the one is replaced by a personal independence which is sure to produce failure in the other. The soldier obeys the orders of his superior, but the voter obeys no one. He demands the fullest recognition as a unit in the great aggregate of his party. More especially does the Republican party contain a large body of men given to habits of independent thought and fearless criticism, which render them peculiarly valuable as the exponents of possible errors, and who at the same time will not brook that their voices shall only be heard in the party against the protests of men certainly not more conscientious than themselves. Such men cannot be brought to advise a president through his office-holders. A good politician would be sure to placate them by fair treatment, and to welcome their admonitions whether he might profit by them or not. But General Grant, with true military propriety, received reports only through his subordinates. His appointees were, to him, commanders of outlying detachments, through whom alone all accounts from the party at large must come.

Very naturally these appointees, feeling safe in their exclusive possession of the presidential ear, began to indulge in practices, for the furtherance of their personal ends, which were intolerable to men accustomed to freedom of deliberation and action within the party. But, worse than all, corruption in

office became scandalously prevalent, and the party was made to bear the odium of a demoralized public service, which could not have happened had the President been accessible through other than the prescribed channels. Had he permitted the party to watch his office-holders, instead of assisting his office-holders to control the party, much that is now remembered to his disadvantage would not have occurred.

The extent to which an individual whom he fully trusted, and who was an intimate personal friend, was able to impose upon him, may be illustrated by a few examples. At an early period of the war, Mr. George K. Leet enlisted as a private soldier at Chicago. After serving in the ranks a short time, he was detailed as a clerk at General Grant's headquarters, where he continued to serve during the war, advancing by successive promotions to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. No doubt the young man did his duty well, and deserved advancement. After the close of the war he remained with the army until the spring of 1869, when he resigned his commission. One morning, soon after his resignation, he entered the office of Mr. Grinnell, in New York, and bore to that gentleman the first information that President Grant had appointed him collector of the port. At the same time he handed Mr. Grinnell a letter of introduction from the President, which stated that Mr. Leet desired to engage in business in New York, and bore most unqualified testimony to his honesty and business capacity. Mr. Grinnell very naturally looked upon this as a request from the President to appoint his friend to some position within his gift, and a conversation developed the fact that he desired to have control of the "general order" business and cartage of the Custom House.

The collector was unable or unwilling to grant the young man all he desired, but secured him a bonus of \$5,600 per year from other parties engaged in the business. With this comfortable income, secured by the President's letter, he returned to Washington, and messaged with Generals Babcock and Porter, military secretaries of the President. It was a singular place of retirement

for a man who was subsisting by levying contributions on the public service, but the source of his income was a secret perfectly safe with his distinguished messmates. When Mr. Grinnell was succeeded as collector by Mr. Thomas Murphy, who was unfortunately what was known as a Tweed Republican, and who could not have been appointed except through the President's peculiar method of ascertaining the sense of his party, Mr. Leet again essayed to obtain control of the "general order" business, and this time with perfect success. It may be well to explain that all goods not delivered from a vessel within forty-eight hours after her arrival are stored in warehouses, from which they are delivered on what are called general orders. It will readily be seen that Mr. Leet, a total stranger in New York, and entirely unknown in the business world, was aiming at no sinecure. Hitherto the warehouses of the steamship lines, whose wharves are at Hoboken and Jersey City, had been used for the general order business arising from those lines—an arrangement which had grown up by reason of its economy and great convenience to importers.

Under Mr. Thomas Murphy's management the business previously transacted at a half dozen warehouses was concentrated at two, under the proprietorship of Leet and Stocking. The change was ruinously oppressive to the commerce of the city. The charges for storage and cartage were more than doubled, and importers were subjected to damaging and vexatious delays in getting their goods from the Custom House.

A petition setting forth the grievance, and signed by all the chief importing firms of the city, was addressed to the Secretary of the Treasury, who advised the collector that he saw no objection to using the warehouses of the steamship lines for the storage of general order goods. The collector paid no attention to the Secretary's wishes, and Leet and Stocking remained undisturbed.

At length an investigating committee developed such a state of things in the New York Custom House that Mr. Murphy resigned. His resignation came as a great relief to Republi-

cans everywhere; for although the majority report of the committee was a skillful attempt at "whitewashing," it was felt that the installation of Leet into a position where he could levy a contribution on the import trade of New York was an outrage that called for emphatic condemnation. With no other capital than the President's letter and the friendship of his secretaries, the ex-army officer was furnished with a business which paid him at least \$100,000 a year! There is no reason to believe that the President was aware of the nature and extent of this transaction. He stated that the letter he gave Leet was simply a testimonial to his honesty and capacity, and was not intended as a recommendation for an appointment in the Custom House. He was informed that parties were applying there who claimed his recommendation, and he wrote to the collector not to appoint such parties. So complete was his ignorance of what must have been well known to Generals Babcock and Porter, that instead of sharing in the relief which Mr. Murphy's resignation brought his party, he supplemented his acceptance of it with the following endorsement of his official integrity: "*It gives me great pleasure to bear testimony to the efficiency, honesty, and zeal with which you have administered the office so long as it has been intrusted to your keeping.*" When this was written, he had not seen the testimony taken by the committee, which was very voluminous and not yet printed; but what must be thought of those Republicans who were his confidential advisers, and who knew all about this flagrant abuse before the investigating committee was appointed?

That endorsement of Murphy was a fearful damper to Republican enthusiasm, and Generals Babcock and Porter became objects of distrust to the Republican masses. General Babcock appears again in the negotiations for the annexation of San Domingo. That whole business was unfortunate in *many* respects. It completely alienated Mr. Sumner from the President, and provoked the first wide alienation of large numbers of earnest Republicans.

There may have been something amusing in the mingled disgust and horror with which Mr. Sumner viewed General Babcock's signature to a diplomatic document, with the official title of "*Aide-de-camp to the President*;" but such a document so signed was not a pleasant thing for Republicans to contemplate. It is now known that there was a gigantic speculation behind that annexation scheme which must have been known to General Babcock.

Mr. Fabens, of New York, who had secured a grant of one-fifth of the public lands, and another covering a large part of the unoccupied available front of the harbor of Samana, was a gentleman of extensive army acquaintance. General Grant undoubtedly considered the acquisition of that harbor a measure of prime importance to the country, but his confidential agent brought it into disrepute. Had he known, what under his exclusiveness he could not know, his well-meant project might not have fallen stillborn. But the most disastrous result of General Grant's habit of trusting too exclusively to his office-holders were the whiskey frauds. A well-organized and wide-spread conspiracy of revenue officials to defraud the government had been so long in successful operation, that its existence was more than suspected in many localities. When the exposure came, the public were not surprised. The greatest criminals were men whom he was in the habit of consulting on party matters, and he sought for no information except through them. So well fortified were they in the possession of all avenues to his confidence, that they believed themselves sure of his protection, and boasted to one another that "they were stronger than the government." In this they were mistaken. Retribution came, and it sought out the messmate of Leet and the partner of Baez.

General Babcock had been all the time in confidential communication with the conspirators, and the inference was irresistible that he shared in their guilt.

So believed a grand jury at St. Louis, and the President was

mortified at the sight of the man whom he had trusted, to the exclusion of the ablest men of his party, standing his trial for felony.

He was acquitted by a jury, but by common consent he has been denied the benefit of his acquittal. No intelligent Republican believes him innocent. It is impossible to reach any other conclusion than that he knew what was going on, and it is certain that he communicated no information to the President.

The Leet and Stocking business, the San Domingo scheme, and the whiskey frauds—to which may be added the District of Columbia Ring—were stupendous swindles, which, when investigated, led the investigators directly into the President's political household. They all pointed to Gen'l Babcock with such painful distinctness that many sincere Republicans feared that the President himself must be *particeps criminis*. It scarcely seemed possible that he could be ignorant of what was so well known to his most trusted confidant, and it was feared the country was about to suffer the unparalleled disgrace of witnessing the exposure of the President as the accomplice of swindlers. Happily the fear proved groundless, but it was not unreasonable. His endorsement of Murphy was unfortunate, and that of Delano still more so. The latter was a cabinet officer who retired distrusted by the people, and the President's certificate of his honesty, even though sincere, was an exceedingly imprudent defiance of public opinion. To add to his misfortunes and those of the Republican party, another cabinet officer was publicly disgraced, and slunk from his high office to avoid impeachment. The President breathed in an atmosphere reeking in corruption, and his party might well tremble lest he should be infected. But he passed through the ordeal unscathed, and his personal honesty suffered no taint. Beyond a doubt he was an honest victim of his own defective grasp of the political side of his executive duties.

These gigantic frauds recoiled with terrible effect upon the

Republican party. Under the watchword of reform, its opponents assailed it with increased vigor, while its energies were paralyzed by the lukewarmness of leaders who should have been zealously at work for its success. There was a growing belief that the party had outlived its usefulness, and many who feared the consequences of electing a President not in sympathy with its purposes, looked upon it as the only hope for the party's resuscitation. It was believed by them that a short lease of power by the country's enemies would again rally the people to the Republican standard, and they were not averse to the experiment. The period was the most turbulent one known in the history of our politics, unless we may except that immediately following the outbreak of the French Revolution. The South was sullen and revengeful, and its Northern allies were unscrupulously active in arousing a sympathy for it in the breasts of a people prone to be generous.

Measures which were wisely precautionary, were denounced as tyrannical alike with those which were unwise proscriptive, in dealing with a people lately transformed from armed foes into peaceable citizens. Throughout the North there was speedily developed a sentimentalism which gradually undermined the Republican party. There was a growing belief that the South was being too harshly treated. There were many shrewd Republican politicians who foresaw this as an inevitable consequence of the policy which their party was pursuing, and attempted to guide it into better channels; but their counsels were unheeded.

The President adhered to the majority, we may say to the overwhelming majority of his party, and perhaps he could not do otherwise. For the results which followed it is not proper to hold him responsible.

But for the odium which fell upon the Republican party in consequence of official corruption he was directly responsible, and it was mainly due to the before-mentioned military defect in his method of civil administration. It is true there were ex-

tenuating circumstances. The demoralizing effects of the civil war upon the moral forces of society were at their maximum, and men, who in the normal course of events would have been trustworthy, became blind to the incompatibility of personal honesty with official dishonesty. The opposition indulged in the most unstinted personal abuse of every one in official position, and the President doubtless thought that the storm of vituperation with which he was deluged was the penalty of official station. He no doubt believed that other public servants were, like himself, targets for all kinds of abuse, and in this belief overlooked many complaints which he would under different circumstances have recognized as legitimate. But while the irregularities of the time aggravated the evil effects of his weakness, they are by no means sufficient to account for it. Making due allowance for all accidents there still remains the inherent pernicious tendency of a blind reliance on personal and official favorites.

At the election in 1876 a majority of the popular vote was cast for a reformer, whose pretensions to the name were known to be fraudulent, and General Grant narrowly escaped handing over the presidential office to a successor who despised the cause in which he had achieved his renown.

Under the wise political management of the present administration the experiment of intrusting the government to other than Republican hands has been sufficiently tried. The destractives have been induced to show their hands, and the conservative element has taken the alarm. The liberals have again become stalwart, and the Republican party is rapidly regaining its lost ground.

With a thorough understanding of the causes which lay at the bottom of his party's decadence President Hayes has applied the necessary remedies with a promptness and success which demonstrated his political ability. He placed the South on its good behavior, and instituted a regeneration of the civil service. By the exercise of great caution in making appointments, and by

the holding of appointees to a rigid responsibility for the faithful performance of official duties, the civil service under the present administration has become as conspicuous for honesty and efficiency as it was under the administration of General Grant for negligence and dishonesty. The personnel of the service has been vastly improved. Federal office-holders no longer wear an air of arrogant assumption among their fellow-Republicans. Their presence at party conventicles is now tolerable and their advice profitable. They are now what they ought to be—zealous Republicans, but not self-sufficient oligarchs, secure in the misuse of patronage by the invulnerability of the presidential ear to other voices than their own. Packing caucuses and conventions, which was such a flagrant feature of the character of Federal employés under General Grant, has become a thing quite unknown under his successor.

The councils of the party are now free, and its internal feuds, which were becoming more and more intense, are rapidly disappearing. Saving the personal pique of a few selfish politicians at the happy results of a policy which they too ostentatiously condemned, there is no dissatisfaction with the present political situation in the ranks of the Republican party.

The next presidential election will show it stronger than ever before. As previously stated, it now seems probable that General Grant will be its candidate if he consents to be; but it is equally probable that his election will prove an unfortunate triumph. Although reconstruction no longer exists as a disturbing element, and the demoralizing effects of the civil war have in a great measure passed away, his one administrative weakness, which his eight years' presidency showed to be ineradicable, still remains. Its effects might be less disastrous in the absence of such powerfully aggravating agencies, were it not that a relapse is much less vigorously resisted than an original transgression. With his re-occupation of the presidential chair we shall assuredly witness a return of appointments on account of personal favoritism, and the re-appearance of appointees as pre-

idential mouthpieces. It is quite probable—nay certain—that many of the old favorites will be restored to positions which they formerly held, and that they will not be slow to punish such of their party as have been instrumental in forcing their retirement. They will construe General Grant's re-election as a popular endorsement of their own objectionable practices, and, doubly sure of presidential approbation, will affect to ostracize all Republicans who have too much self-respect to be either led or driven by a mere office-holder.

The President will again unconsciously become surrounded by a cordon of intriguing favorites, of whose machinations he will be kept in ignorance until corruption shall have again pervaded the public service.

Then will follow another exposure of fraudulent practices, less extensive than under his former administration, but sufficient to stagger the party. Party feuds will again revive, and zealous Republicans will again become lukewarm.

The old feeling of the desirability of a change will revive, and will probably be strengthened by a better attitude of the opposing party. The conservative political forces of the country will again be dissipated with a diminished power of recuperation. In short, it is no rash prophecy to predict that General Grant's re-election will seriously threaten the ruin of the Republican party.